



We are pleased to announce the next Friends of the Kern Institute lecture:

Worship without Image: Gaurī in her aniconic Pañcapiṇḍī form

by dr. Sushmita Das

Date : Thursday, February 19, 2026

Time : 16.00h

Venue : Leiden University, **Herta Mohr Building, room 1.80.** The lecture will be followed by **drinks** in the LIAS common room of the same Herta Mohr Building (first floor).

Abstract

Śaiva Siddhānta, a major tradition of Śaivism within Hinduism, primarily focuses on Śiva and his mode of worship, performed by men. However, a Śaiva tantra known as the Bṛhatkālottara contains a chapter called the Gaurīyāgapaṭala, which is entirely dedicated to Gaurī, Śiva's counterpart, and prescribes rituals performed by women. This chapter describes the worship of Gaurī in an aniconic form, known as Pañcapiṇḍī, which comprises four spheres arranged at the corners with one sphere positioned above them.

This form of worship is also attested in other Sanskrit sources, such as the Skandapurāṇa, Agnipurāṇa, Caturvargacintāmaṇi, etc. Moreover, representations of Pañcapiṇḍī are found not only in India (Odisha, Madhya Pradesh), but also in Nepal and Southeast Asia.

This presentation will discuss in detail the worship of Gaurī by women in the Pañcapiṇḍī form as described in Śaiva scriptures and other Sanskrit sources. It will be accompanied by a rich survey of archaeological evidence of the Pañcapiṇḍī form.



Sushmita Das holds a PhD in Sanskrit from École française d'Extrême-Orient, Pondicherry and



Pondicherry University. She previously worked as a Project Associate at the Regional Centre, Puducherry, of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India). Her research focuses on the roles of women in Śaiva and Śākta rituals, with particular attention to unpublished ritual texts, iconographies, inscriptions and manuscripts. She is currently a Gonda Research Fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden University. Her current research examines the sixty forms of the Goddess Maṅgalā as described in the *Devīpurāṇa*.